

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE STATE AS EMPLOYERS
OF LABOUR.

BY D. NESBIT.

I would have preferred that my subject had been "Our Responsibilities as Employers of Labour." The introduction of the word "State" appears to me superfluous. We learn in the Catechism that all duties fall under two heads: our duty towards God and our duty towards our neighbour; and it seems to me that this covers everything. This, however, is by the way. You must forgive me for quarrelling with the title. Our duty is to humanity, not to a system; to our countrymen and countrywomen, not to the earth and stones of England.

In a better state than the present, in the state which I believe and hope will one day be established, there will be but two kinds of service rendered by one human being to another. The one will be love service or courtesy service, as when a man jumps into the river to save another, or when he opens the door for a child or directs a stranger on his road. The other will be rendered in exchange for equal service back, as when a student at Scale How, instead of making her own bed and dusting her own room, arranges with her friend that she will make two beds in exchange for the dusting of two rooms.

In practice this works out that you may explain to your servant that it is her duty to sweep and dust for you while you do the cooking which is to feed her directly, or while you are giving the French lessons which are to feed her indirectly; but you may not (according to my lights) expect her to consider it her duty to work for you while you read yellow-backs in the drawing-room and because she is a servant and you are a lady.

I remember once asking a forlorn little maid, who might have been the prototype of the Marchioness, to clean a gas stove. On retiring from the kitchen, I was just fixing up a

hammock for myself in the garden, when I heard a protesting soliloquy of "Lazy thing; she ain't doing nothing herself." At first this made me feel angry, and I lay in the hammock justifying myself. I told myself I had been teaching all the morning, and that this was my half-holiday; then it occurred to me that Ivy did not have as many half-holidays as I, and she scored that point. But I began to argue that I was doing *higher* work than Ivy, and was altogether a more cultivated person. And so it stopped at the time, and the capitalist was justified, as usual. In after years, however, I came to the conclusion that I had been in the wrong. The fact that I had had the advantage of an Ambleside training, and that this training gave me the power to keep a school, did not give me the right to take more half-holidays than I gave. It was only another instance of mistaking might for right.

If we demand the whole time and best energy of an employee, we should give her back the whole of our time and energy. If we buy a dress which has taken a week to make, we can only pay for it fairly by exchanging for it the product of our week's labour. This is a difficult doctrine to live up to, but it seems to me an inspiring one, and as an ideal it makes us simplify our lives and gives an incentive to productive work.

We do not all keep scullery-maids from the slums, but we are all employers of labour indirectly. We all have purchasing power, and whenever we purchase an article which a fellow creature has made, we are helping to stimulate the demand for his or her labour.

As employees of labour we are frequently in the position of slaveholders, and this fact makes our responsibility very tremendous. Lest you should challenge this statement, let me set out what seem to me the essentials of slavery. The slave of the Roman centurion, for instance, was at the beck and call of his master. His master had the power to render his whole life either bearable or unbearable. The kind of

work he did, whether productive or unproductive to the community, congenial or uncongenial to himself, was his master's choice and not his own. Theoretically he could refuse nothing. If his owner had commanded him to perform some vile and degrading action, the only alternatives to cringing obedience were death or the chance of escape. If he escaped, he might be caught and punished; or, if fortunate, he might hide and subsist on such crumbs of charity as were available. In a free country, on the contrary, the land and other means of production would be accessible to anyone willing to work. No man or woman who could and would make shoes would be unemployed until every barefoot child was shod. No one who could make bread would go hungry. No bricklayers would hunt for work while four families slept in one room. No mothers beg to be taken on at a factory while their children went untended.

But we have not this happy state of things. Those who have no access to the means of production (*i.e.*, no capital), and also who have had no specialised education (education being really only another form of capital), are often as much in the power of the employer as the centurion's servant was in the power of the centurion. Whether their work shall be degrading or ennobling, congenial or uncongenial, depends, not on their choice, but on ours. Many of the poorest are offered the choice between unworthy employment and death by starvation or the wandering life of a tramp, subsisting in ignominy on such crumbs of charity as fall to them.

If we, as purchasers, create a demand for inartistic, slovenly work, if we buy things made in a feverish hurry, instead of things made with patient care, we cannot excuse ourselves because we have paid the market price. If we always make our servant sweep the drawing-room and never let her arrange the flowers in it, we cannot blame her if she looks upon work as unpleasant, and service as degrading.

We must create a demand for perfect work and for works

of art—by which latter I do *not* mean mere “ornaments,” but work which we should have been pleased to be able to perform ourselves. We must remember that we must restore to those in our power the liberty so dear to ourselves. We must allow our servants, for instance, to use their own taste. If we let her arrange the flowers, it must be in her own way, not in ours. It is not enough to “make” her do things well. We must encourage her to take pleasure in doing them well. Now before we can take pleasure in any work we must see that it serves a useful purpose and that it gives pleasure. If a servant considers that serviettes are just “gentlefolks’ fads,” do not make her put them on. Put them on yourself.

In purchasing, you cannot do better than follow Miss Mason's advice: “Buy what you want at a price you can afford”; *not* “the best thing at the lowest possible price,” but *want* only for use and not for show or because “Miss X. has one just like it.”

Then you must not expect too much uniformity. Artistic perfection is good, but the “finish” of commerce is often bad. It is the result of labour like that of the pyramid builders. We want to increase the demand for labour like that of the old cathedral builders.

Then the person of the labourer—the producer of what is of service or of beauty—should be honoured. “Please, Miss, I can't make Master Lionel walk home properly with me,” said a nurse one day to me. No wonder. He was called “Master,” and the little imp lived up to his title and mastered his nurse. I consider it wrong to make nurses and workers call little chits who have yet to prove their worth “Master” or “Miss.” How can they grow up to respect the worker above the mere possessor?

Many very well-meaning people are very kind to their employees, but yet do not *respect* them. They will not, for instance, allow an employee to differ from them in opinion. They do not apply their psychology to the poor. They

forget that they need fellowship as well as kindness, freedom as well as protection; room for spiritual, mental, and physical development as well as a living wage; the opportunity to do what *they* think right, as well as the chance to do what *we* think right. They are willing to teach us as well as to be taught by us. If they were free, if they could live however simply, however laboriously, without the capitalist class (to which we belong whether or no we have "private means"), we might say. "Do it just *my* way, because I pay you"; but when they are in our power we must not do so, lest we drive them to sweated labour or starvation.

We must as individuals restore as far as possible the liberty which our society denies to the poor, as the centurion gave more than the legal "rights" of the time to his slave. *E.g.*, a lady asks: "Would you *make* your servant wear caps?" I should answer: "Emphatically *no*." I would not *make* her. "But the cap is so becoming, the uniform so sensible and cleanly, surely you would not forbid it?"—"No; I should tell her that I considered (as I do consider) the cap to be pretty and becoming, and that I would myself have no objection to wearing one."—"Then why not make her?"—"Because, although the cap is not degrading in itself, if she feels degraded in it it is so to her. If she can be brought to see its use and even to take pride in it, as many do, I should be delighted, but *my* thinking it a good thing does not give me the right to make her wear it against her will."

DISCUSSION ON CITIZENSHIP.

PAPER BY MISS E. A. SMITH.

In this discussion several ways were mentioned in which children might make friends of poorer children, and so help them in a variety of ways.

The Sunbeam Mission was suggested as a means of putting children into communication with each other, the

plan being that the child who is better off writes to the poorer child and sends her the Sunbeam magazines, presents, etc., and *vice-versâ*.

The general opinion of the meeting was that personal intercourse was much better than a correspondence, but that it was rendered difficult by the parents' fear of infection.

Miss Allen said she knew of some children who had a weekly sewing party for an hour on a half-holiday to make garments for a poor family. She also showed the great value of the *BIG* ideas gained by the Boy Scout and the Girl Guide in their work. In looking after one particular child, or even family, children are somewhat apt to estimate their work too highly.

Miss Parish said that on the other hand each child must feel his own importance as a member of the State—that his actions really matter to his country. Mrs. Higgs' (of Oldham) paper at the Birmingham Conference (now published as a P.N.E.U. pamphlet) was very illuminating on this subject. A number of children in Oldham were banded together by a promise to render their town more beautiful by behaviour, tidiness, keeping flowers in their window, etc.

The Eugenic question being touched upon, it was generally felt that this should be left to the parents, and that the children would ask the right question at the right time. "Ourselves" shows children the importance of personal relation to mankind. If fuller knowledge was desirable, the following book was recommended: "How we are Born," by Mrs. W. J., published by C. W. Daniel.

Miss E. A. Smith emphasised the importance of our gaining knowledge of questions of the day, so that our children may know that there are two sides to every question. Miss Mason's paper at the Birmingham Conference shows us that opinions and principles are the outcome of knowledge.

Miss Nesbitt's paper called forth a good deal of questioning as to its practicability. Considering the comparative

need for rest after mental and after manual work, it was said that the need was greater after the former, and that in considering the price to be paid for any manual production, it was impossible to fix the material value of mental work performed in the same time (as was taken by the manual production) in order to give an equal price as was suggested by the writer.

Miss Nesbitt's ideas were very highly appreciated, but it was thought that if we allowed the maids to leave undone those things of which they did not approve it would lead us to a serious *impasse*; rather let us educate them and draw out their taste. Perfection is equally beautiful in their work as in our own.

CRITICISM LESSON ON ORDNANCE MAPS.

By J. H. SMITH.

Objects :—

1. To teach the girls how to read an Ordnance Survey map.
2. To increase the girls' interest in maps.
3. To increase their powers of imagination.

Draw from the girls what they already know about Ordnance maps. Put the signs on the board and let them say for what each stands.

Draw from the girls the following similarities and contrasts between an ordinary and an Ordnance map :—

Similarities.

Drawn to scale. Marking of the lines of latitude and longitude. Coast line, lakes, etc., shown in the same way. Railway lines sometimes shown on ordinary maps and always on Ordnance maps; etc.

Contrasts.

More detail given in an Ordnance map. All roads, towns, villages, hamlets, etc., are marked. Mountains are shown by contour lines instead of by "shading," as on an ordinary map; etc.

Draw from the girls what they can tell about the mountains (where the rise is gradual or sudden, where the valleys and ridges lie, etc., etc., from the contour diagram on the blackboard. Explain that trigonometrical stations are heights taken by the men of the Ordnance Survey and marked by cairns, which serve as guides in measuring other levels in the district.

Ask the girls if they know a bench mark and its meaning. If not, explain that it is a broad arrow with a horizontal line at its apex, placed at least every mile, and generally oftener, to mark the level of the road above the sea at that point. Ask the girls if they have seen these marks, and where?

Draw on the board an imaginary map illustrating most of the Ordnance signs for mountains, woods, roads, churches, post-offices, etc. Let the girls read it, telling what sort of a country they would traverse if they took a walking tour from the village at A to the town B, and what would be their compass direction.

THE TEACHING OF MATHEMATICS AND ARITHMETIC.

By A. C. EDGAR.

Before discussing the methods of teaching any particular subject, we should first inquire into the reason why it needs to be taught at all. I shall therefore begin this paper by saying that mathematics and arithmetic occupy an important place in our curriculum, not only on account of their intrinsic value, but also because they should be of use to a child in helping him to form habits of attention, concentration, quickness, etc., in training him to be accurate, in developing his power of reasoning, and even in providing opportunities for strengthening his will. And for this reason it is a great mistake to try to teach mathematics when our pupils are at all tired mentally. Therefore, if they have already been working at other subjects, it would probably be well, before beginning such a lesson, to give them drill